



# MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

## This edition:

### BIBLE & ECONOMY

De-throning Mammon:  
Money in the Kingdom of God

*Jonathan Cornford (p.3)*

### EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Diving in Deep:  
Waste, Providence and Dumpster Diving

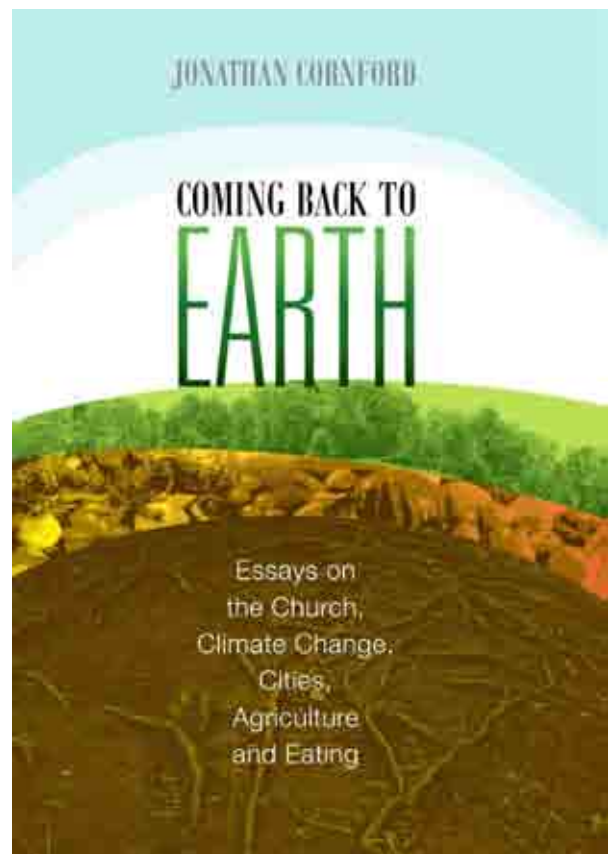
*Raylene Frantz(p.8)*

## News from Manna Gum

Our big news is the release of Jonathan's first book, *Coming Back to Earth*, published with Morning Star Press. This is a collection and re-working of some of his longer pieces of writing, including some that began as *Manna Matters* articles. It is a short book, only 100 pages long and we think quite easy to read – in fact, it would make an ideal birthday or Christmas present for that loved one who is struggling to reconcile theological and ethical angst with the state of the world... See the back page for more details.

We were hugely blessed and greatly humbled by the response to our special appeal raising money for a Manna Gum study trip to the UK. We raised the target of \$5000, which makes the trip now well viable. We are deeply thankful for your support.

Unfortunately, while the financial side of things is taken care of, the timing turned out to be abominable. Most of the people we wanted to see were unavailable, so we have had to postpone the trip until next year. This was a bit disappointing



for us, as we were hoping to make the timing work with our family trip in June/July, but it looks like it will make for a better study trip in the long run. The money raised from the appeal will be quarantined until then.

This first part of the year has been the first go for Jonathan at combining normal Manna Gum work with his Ph.D study on Christianity and capitalism. It has been a stretch, but also very rewarding, and has certainly added a renewed energy to his work. Jonathan will share a bit about the project he is pursuing in the next edition of *Manna Matters*.

In November this year, we are re-starting our intensive exposure week, *A Different Way*, now running out of Bendigo and hosted by the Seeds Community. See page 2 for details.



# A DIFFERENT WAY

A week-long exploration of Christ's call to a new way of living

20 - 25 November 2016

**Bendigo**



Come and spend a week exploring Christian alternatives in areas of money, employment, consumption, sustainability, family, community, care for creation and serving the poor. The week will be hosted by the Seeds community in Long Gully, Bendigo, with input from some of our friends.

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- Study the Bible together
- Reflection and discussion
- Get your hands dirty
- Meet interesting people
- Cook and eat together
- Sing & pray

## THINGS YOU WILL DISCUSS

- Vocation & employment
- Sustainable resource use
- Hospitality & the poor
- Urban living
- Community and mission
- Money & budgeting

## THINGS YOU WILL EXPLORE

- Growing food and making compost
- Ethical shopping
- Community development
- Waste
- Land care and restoration
- Good food!

**Cost: \$100**

**Registrations close 4 November. Places will be limited, so hurry!**

To download registration forms or for more info, check the website:

[www.mannagum.org.au](http://www.mannagum.org.au)

 **MANNA GUM**  
— Enough for all —





# DE-THRONING MAMMON

## Money in the Kingdom of God

by Jonathan Cornford

### Finding Life in Jesus' Hard Teachings on Money (Part 4)

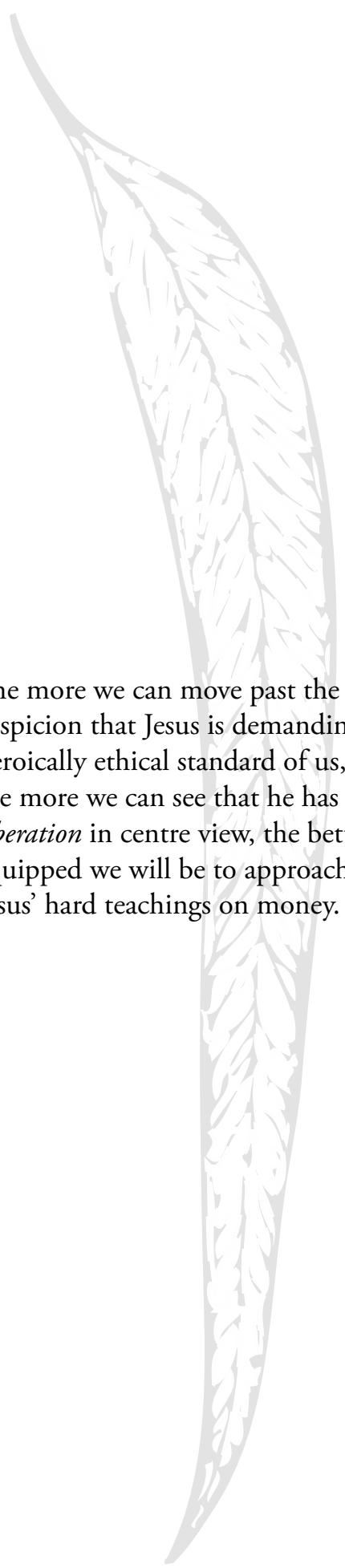
In the last three articles in this series, I have been attempting to build a picture of the power of Jesus' attack on money. At the heart of this attack is Jesus' startling identification of money as *Mammon*, an idolatrous spiritual force that is in opposition to God and his work in the world: 'You *cannot* serve both God and Mammon'. Throughout the New Testament there are consistent warnings against the accumulation of wealth, most vocally from Jesus, but also from Paul, James and John of Patmos, not to mention similar themes in the Old Testament prophets. For biblical writers, the allure of money brings *both* the likely implication in economic injustice *as well as* spiritual peril. Money has the triple effect of encouraging the illusion of our independence from God, empowering us to gratify the desires of our less-healthy selves (what Paul would call 'the desires of the flesh') and encouraging our natural proclivity to seek our own interests over and against the interests of others.

In short, we need to be saved from the power of money. That is, for the sake of the health of our relationships and our souls, we each need to be individually liberated from the spiritual bondage that money can bring; but also, the *world* needs to be saved from the destructive forces that greed unleashes. Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of climate change – an issue of planetary peril that is being driven by our insatiable hunger for more. However, we can trace the same destructive tendencies of money in a million different directions.

If these are the stakes, is it any wonder that Jesus' language is so forceful and so uncompromising? 'Woe to you who are rich'. 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God'. 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon'. 'None of you can become my disciple unless you give up all your possessions.' There is no doubt these are hard teachings – *very* hard teachings – but might they just also be teachings that lead us toward abundant life?

In two consecutive chapters of Luke, 18 and 19, we are given two stories about two rich men who seek out Jesus, with two quite different outcomes. One is clear about what he wants – 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' (18:18) – and is given an equally clear answer: 'There is one thing lacking. Sell all you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me' (18:22). He went away sorrowing, prompting Jesus' pained observation about camels and needles. The other is wary of Jesus, but then surprised by his graciousness; his unprompted response comes flowing out: 'Look, half of my possessions I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I will pay back four times as much', leading Jesus to joyfully declare, 'Today salvation has come to this house!' (19:9)

Yes, these are both stories about ethics and justice: in both cases there are questions about the means by which these two men became wealthy and the role they each played in perpetuating an oppressive social structure. But they are equally stories about salvation; they are about the narrow way that leads to life. In both cases, the gospel writers make it clear that Jesus is concerned for each of the rich men as an individual person. The more we can move past the suspicion that Jesus is demanding a heroically ethical standard of us, and the more we can see that he has *our liberation* in centre view, the better equipped we will be to approach Jesus' hard teachings on money.



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'There is one thing lacking ...!'. Jesus and the rich young ruler, Luke 18:22

The message of Jesus must always be understood as fundamentally a message of salvation. Our problem is that we have made the idea of salvation too small and too remote – pie in the sky when you die. When the Bible talks about salvation, it is always talking about a movement from death to life that must begin in the here and now and it is always addressing our actual *experience* of entrapment by forces which squeeze life and goodness out of the world. The concept of salvation applies to immediate individual circumstances, to whole people-groups suffering from oppression, to the interior state of our souls and to the health of the whole ecological order. (For a longer discussion of 'the economy of salvation', see *Manna Matters* Nov 2010). In the case of money, we are in trouble at every one of these levels.

So what do we do about it? I want to put forward the crazy idea that inherent in Jesus' teachings are a basic set of *practices* that work to defuse the power of Mammon and that these practices are, as in Moses' summing up of the Torah, 'not too hard for you, nor too far away. [...] No, the word is very near to you.' (Deut 30:11-14) Once we dig into what Jesus taught on money, we find a series of basic, consistent principles that each of us can begin to apply in *some way or another*.

There are three essential dimensions to the New Testament's teaching on money: renunciation, generosity and gratitude.

## 1. Renunciation: The liberation of saying no

Consider the following two statements:

- (i) money is a spiritual power that can have an enormous hold over us, whether through desire (the things money can get for us) or fear (what might happen to us without it);
- (ii) we cannot live without money; we are surrounded by it and it passes through our hands every day.

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Again and again, Jesus is effectively calling  
his followers to say 'no' to Mammon

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Clearly, this places us in a tricky position. Moreover, as I mentioned in the first article in this series (May 2015), Mammon is a belief system that has its own theology and laws which are instilled in us every day: time is money; money is security; money is essential to happiness; money must 'work for us'; money is the most valuable thing we have to give. The whole point about idolatry is that you don't have to *like* an idol to still believe that it would be prudent for you to make the sacrifices it demands.

Jesus' concern is to break this illusion and help us come to a deep understanding of the truth that there is no security except in God and that the most important and valuable things in life cannot be bought and sold. And so he says things like, 'Sell your possessions and give alms' (Lk 12:33); 'Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth' (Matt 6:19); and 'None of you can become my disciple unless you give up all your possessions.' (Lk 14:33)

Again and again, Jesus is effectively calling his followers to say 'no' to Mammon because that is the only way to break its power. And because we are beings made up of body and soul, spirit *and* matter, our saying 'no' to Mammon needs to be both *spiritual* and *actual*. That means giving it up. The aphorism so often spouted by Protestants, 'It doesn't matter how wealthy you are, as long as you don't *treasure* that wealth', is complete bunkum. Likewise, the very selective reading of 1 Timothy 6:10, 'It is the *love* of money, and not money as such, that leads us astray', amounts to a denial of the plain meaning of the passage (6:3-19) which is a clear warning against wealth.

Jesus repeatedly asks his followers to actively and materially say 'no' to the destructive force of Mammon in the world and to show up the lies of Mammon by breaking its laws. This was the example of Jesus himself, whom Paul emphasises 'became poor', and the community of his disciples who 'gave up everything' to follow him. They were an



assembly of the poor who broke the laws of Mammon at every turn, and, in doing so, turned the world upside down.

At this point, some readers will be getting distinctly nervous. Am I seriously suggesting that you have to give away all your money to follow Jesus? The answer is no. It will come as some relief to readers to know that the church, even from the earliest days, has never taught a *literal* observance of Jesus' teachings on money – although, I hasten to add, there have been saints through the ages who *have* taken them literally. But not taking these teachings *literally* does not mean that we do not need to take them *very seriously*. We are already pretty good at this with other parts of the gospel – when Jesus says, 'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off', we understand immediately that he does not actually want us to cut our hands off, but to take sin very seriously. Why have we found this movement so difficult with his teachings on money?

All of us – and those of us in the wealthy West more than any others – need concrete practices of saying 'no' to Mammon to break its power. And, of course, the easiest way to do this is to give it away. When we simply give away money that we could have rightfully kept for ourselves, we commit a heresy against the laws of Mammon; we act according to another law and another Lord and, in doing so, we de-throne Mammon, turning money back into a mere means of exchange.

This does not mean that we need to give away all our money, but we do need *disciplines of giving* that take us out of our comfort zones. I have written about this at length elsewhere (see 'Living with an open hand', *Manna Matters*, August 2011), but, generally speaking, a healthy mix of giving should include a measure of structured giving (tithing) which is built into our household budgets as well as acts of spontaneous generosity (almsgiving) that are unplanned and uncalculated.

Another important way of renouncing Mammon is to choose not to earn it in the first place. This has been a key component in Kim's and my decision years ago to only work part-time and to be satisfied with lower wages if we thought we were doing the job we ought to be (see 'Less is more', *Manna Matters*, April 2013). Other examples would be passing up a promotion to stay working in a position where you feel you can do the most good; or if you are in business or self-employed, charging lower rates than the market for the goods or services you provide; or accepting a lower dividend of profits in order to employ more people. The point is, besides foregoing an opportunity to make more money as a healthy act in itself, there are thousands of scenarios in life where we can achieve substantive good in the world if we can only resist the allure of money.

The practices of responsible consumption (see *Manna Matters*, August 2013) are also a form of renunciation. Choosing to pay a higher price for the sake of more just and ecologically sound practices, when we could easily pay less, clearly contravenes the laws of Mammon; just ask all those economists who have decried the fair trade movement because of its flouting of the laws of the market.

It is worth ending this section with a final observation about renunciation (saying 'no'). Our culture has generally got the wrong end of the stick about this aspect of religious faith and it is widely looked upon with disdain. Movies such as *Babette's Feast* and *Chocolat* – both of which I enjoyed – have been less than helpful in



'Today salvation has come to this house ...'. Jesus and Zacchaeus, Luke 19:9.

this regard. They both painted a very grim picture of dour religious asceticism – one that has some basis in history, but is typically overplayed – which is set free by the discovery of the sensual pleasures of food. If these movies had played to audiences caught up in a life-denying spiritualised and pharisaical asceticism, they might have struck the right note; however, the actual audience – us – was a culture that is hopelessly mired in addictive self-gratification of almost every kind. If ever there were a people who needed to rediscover the *meaning* of renunciation, it is us.



Let us get this straight. The way of the gospel is the way of renunciation:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mk 8:34-35)

Whether it be money, community, forgiveness, prayer, fasting or service, we are in every dimension of Jesus' teaching being led out of the abyss of 'self' and into the communion of love that is the only viable habitat for life. The teaching on money is just one subset of this great movement.

Finally, let's not confuse renouncing Mammon with denying the goodness of material things. In fact, it is via the path of renunciation that we are liberated to discover *the true goodness* of the material world that God has created, but more on that later.

## 2. Generosity – the movement toward the other

So far, I have been discussing giving as a means of renunciation; however, it should also be clear that Jesus doesn't just call us to practices of giving as a negative act against Mammon; he is also calling us to respond powerfully and materially to the need we see in the world.

Jesus seems to advocate reckless generosity: 'Give to everyone who begs from you' (Matt 5:42). Once again, it seems impossible to take such a teaching literally. With the profusion of charities these days (some of them questionable) employing aggressive and intrusive marketing strategies to corner their slice of the charity pie, we clearly need some means of filtering and deciding who we give to.

Similarly, the issue of direct begging on the streets is one that contains a knot of ethical, moral and spiritual conundrums for which it is impossible to come up with some sort of rule that adequately covers all cases. There are times when it is good to say 'yes' and times when it is right to say 'no', but unfortunately most times it is completely unclear. What does seem clear is that Jesus never wants us to be unaffected by such situations. He is calling us out of ourselves and into the pain of the world and the character of that movement is overwhelmingly one of grace and generosity.

If I am honest, I must admit that I find this extremely difficult. I am much more comfortable with a practice of giving, even if it is difficult, that clearly delimits my moral obligations. I usually don't feel at all generous to those asking me for money. But I cannot get around the fact – and I have tried – that the generosity that Jesus is calling us to is *open-ended*. This means that generosity is something that I need to *cultivate*, spiritually and practically, and there will never be a point when I can say to myself, 'Now I am generous enough'.

## 3. Gratitude – the economics of content

As well as beginning to look for ways to say 'no' to Mammon and 'yes' to others, another key dimension of financial practice implicit in Jesus' teaching is the cultivation of gratitude. It is hard to point to a single text that makes this point because the whole New Testament is so awash with *thanksgiving* that we often fail to notice its presence.

It is like a vivid background that sets off a foreground scene – you don't notice its effect until it is taken away.

Almost every time we see Jesus breaking bread in the gospels, he is giving thanks. The letters of Paul are full not only with his own thanksgiving, but also continual exhortations to *be thankful*, and very often he has people's material circumstances in mind. In Philippians he says something rather like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God.' (Phil 4:6) We should take Paul very seriously when he writes to the Colossians, 'Devote yourselves to prayer, *keeping alert* in it with thanksgiving' (Col 4:2). For Paul, prayer and thanksgiving are essential to staying alert to what is truly happening in life; it is essential to *seeing clearly*. We cannot hope to have a healthy relationship to material things if we are not properly, even *reverentially*, thankful for the goodness of the earth's bounty and that part of the earth's gifts that we call 'ours'.

Gratitude ignores the voices and comparisons about what we could have, or should have, and instead pays close and mindful attention to what we do have and to the essential goodness of material creation: 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, *provided it is received with thanksgiving*' (1 Tim 4:4). Gratitude recognises that every *thing* that money procures for us

comes to us from the earth, perhaps even at the cost of the life of another living creature, and comes through the labour of another person. That is, these things come to us at a *cost* which is more than just the monetary price. That is why so much of the

economic instruction of the Torah is about *observing limits* to our consumption, in one way or another. (See 'So Shall We Reap', *Manna Matters*, August 2015 for a discussion on observing limits.)

Gratitude is the essential precondition for that other foundational biblical attitude to material goods: contentment. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. At the centre of this prayer is a disarmingly simple request about economics: 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matt 6:11). I have written about this before at greater length (see *Manna Matters*, November 2013), but essentially this is a way of praying that orients us to an economy of 'enough'. The instruction on prayer is then followed by a teaching on a positive attitude to fasting (and note, the assumption is '*when* you fast', not '*if* you fast (6:16-18)); the teaching on treasure ('Do not store up treasure for yourselves') which we have already discussed (6:19-21); a teaching on taking responsibility for how desire is shaped within us ('The eye is the lamp of the body', 6:22-23); the teaching on Mammon (6:24); and finally, the extended teaching on 'Do not worry about tomorrow' (6:24-34). Taken all together, we can see that an extended sequence of the Sermon on the Mount is given over to teachings that all point, in one way or another, to the importance of being content with what we have.

This theme is taken up strongly by Paul in that often-misrepresented passage of 1 Timothy 6:

Of course, there is great gain in godliness *combined* with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; *but if we have food and clothing, we*

*will be content with these.* But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Tim 6:6-9)

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul takes this idea even further:

For I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11-13)

Here Paul is expressing a liberation to *enjoy good things* when they come to him. Having renounced the *pursuit* of material things, he is able to appreciate their full goodness when they come his way.

This is not some deep spiritual mystery; it is something we all know at some level. My kids love lollies, but Kim and I don't often let them eat them. By today's libertarian standards, we must seem almost authoritarian, although we are really only following the parenting norm of about thirty years ago (when we were kids). I have seen kids guzzle a whole bag of lollies and hardly pay attention to what they are eating; however, my girls get *genuine pleasure* out of eating one or two lollies. By learning to be content without lollies in their life, they can experience in lollies a *goodness* that is otherwise hard to detect in our culture's abuse of them. Economists know this as the law of diminishing returns: the more you have of something, the less enjoyment it brings you.

One of the truly great tragedies of the gluttoned affluence of modern consumerism is that we get so *little* enjoyment out of the earth's good resources that come through our houses on the way to landfill. We have turned luxuries into necessities and made that which is wondrous, commonplace. As Wendell Berry and others have pointed out, our problem is not that we are too materialistic, but that we are not materialistic enough. We don't actually recognise and give thanks for the true goodness of the material things that surround us and so are trapped on a treadmill of fleeting consumption and disposal. As a culture, we have gained the whole world, but lost our soul.

Right at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed us to this paradox: it is the meek – those who claim nothing for themselves – who inherit the earth (Matt 5:5). Only those who don't feel the need to claim the earth's good things for themselves can see how truly good they are. The economy of God begins with thankfulness.

So far I have been describing an attitude of gratitude and contentment but not really a practice. The key practices of these attitudes are not rocket science:

1. Limiting and curtailing consumption across the board. For most of us, this means attempting to reverse the process by which luxuries are normalised. This is incredibly difficult, like swimming upstream, and can really only be done one thing at a time.

2. Becoming conscious and then proactive about how desire is being shaped within us. This means taking arms against the sea of advertising and image production that surrounds and choosing to limit our exposure to such manipulation.
3. Becoming conscious that we all measure ourselves by comparison to others. The key question is, who are we comparing ourselves to? Forget the Joneses; as Paul says, they are 'trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction'. If you have spent time in a developing country, then you have there a much healthier frame of reference by which to evaluate your material standard of living. If not, a good rule of thumb is to use your grandparents at your age as your frame of reference. If they are still alive, quiz them about their standard of living. Cultivate these alternate frames of reference.

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## Our problem is not that we are too materialistic but that we are not materialistic enough

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I began this series by asking a seemingly simple question: what is money? It turns out that answering that question – even in secular terms – is not at all straightforward. Nevertheless, for all its complications, money is merely a tool created by humans and it is a wonderfully useful tool. It is

perhaps one of our most amazing inventions. However, such is the nature of fallen humanity and our disordered desire that we have transformed money into something much more – an idol of immense spiritual power and destructive force in the world. As with all idolatry, we have become enslaved by the work of our own hands.

Understanding that this is our condition is essential to understanding the intent of Jesus' teachings on money. What I have been attempting to convey through this discussion is the movement from bondage to liberation; from the abyss of self into the communion of love; from death to life. There is no doubt that these teachings are hard, but I hope that as we understand his intent more clearly – the method to his madness – that they will begin to seem less hard. Moreover, I have tried to stress that just because we do not, and most of us cannot, take his teachings literally, does not mean that we should not take them very seriously. In the seemingly simple practices of renunciation, generosity and gratitude, we find a deep and multi-dimensional response to the problem of money, one that exorcises it of the spirit of Mammon and allows us to reconsider anew, and from an entirely different standpoint, the uses of money within the kingdom of God. Indeed, this whole series on money can be understood as just one case study, one outworking, of Jesus' foundational proclamation, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand'.





# DIVING IN DEEP

## Waste, providence and dumpster diving

by Raylene Frantz

Some time ago, I had a personal revelation: loving God and serving him can be as simple as loving and preserving the world which God so lovingly created. Further along in my faith journey, I found myself drawn to sharing life with people who had been broken by life's struggles. Living life in this way revealed to me the extreme inequality that exists within our nation and hence I became much more interested and aware of issues that affected the people within my community. I learnt that while \$8 billion worth of edible food is thrown out each year, almost 90% of food relief agencies don't have enough food to meet demand. On further investigation, I discovered that 20-40% of fruit and vegetables are rejected before they even reach the shops because they don't look pretty enough.

Australia is one of the highest per capita waste producers in the world, ranking in the top five most wasteful nations. We produce over 18 million tonnes of waste per year—the equivalent of three million garbage trucks full of compacted rubbish. Inspired by the overwhelming enormity of the problem of waste in Australia and its vast impact on the people in my community, I joined some friends in my debut dumpster diving venture.

It has been many years since that first expedition. I remember the disbelief and incredulity I experienced that first night. I couldn't believe what I was seeing: copious amounts of fresh produce still within its 'use-by' date yet passed its 'display until' date; crates of unopened tins and jars of food that had sauce of some description spilt on them; overly-packaged processed foods with slightly damaged outer packaging; cartons upon cartons of eggs with only one or two cracked eggs in them. I was astounded!

Many years on, I witness this same astonishment and disbelief each time a novice diver accompanies me on one of my weekly trips. Having been a 'diver' for some time now, my predictions of what I might find are usually pretty spot on... however, some nights I am still amazed at just what we find. Regularly, we come across a 'Stuff' dumpster. This occurs when the store clears out non-food items that are not selling as quickly as they would like. These items can include clothing (and lots of it), electrical goods, camping gear, cosmetics, gardening equipment, kitchen wares, toys...and the list goes on. Most commonly, these items are still in their packaging and in perfect condition (except the packaging may now have a splatter of spaghetti sauce smeared over it, as a casualty of being thrown in the bin).

PHOTO BY CLAYTON DANIEL

I remember the disbelief and incredulity I experienced that first night. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.





It has become my mission to rescue this 'stuff' and distribute it to people who are in need of such things. I have made very good use of the charity donation bags that are regularly left in our mail box. My other reason is to prevent such items from ending up in landfill without even having been used. It does my head in that so many items are shipped all the way here to Australia (predominantly from China). They are then transported to stores, only to be transported again to land fill, where depending on what they are made from, they can take thousands of years to break down.

As with many ventures or activities, my motivation for dumpster diving has changed over time. Ten years ago, when I first began, my life looked quite different to what it does today. In my early dumpster diving days, I was fiercely passionate about actively responding to unjust societal issues that affected the people in my community. Living life with the broken was my primary vocation and I dedicated all of my time and energy to it. Dumpster diving became an integral part of this. I remember feeling quite liberated by the idea that by living off the waste of our society, I could spend more time doing the work that I loved, rather than the kind I simply

got paid for. Dumpster diving helped to build and strengthen our community. My housemates and I were often accompanied by community members on our weekly dives, who would then help sort and clean everything, ready to distribute to others the next morning.

Today, with two young children in tow, my life is not quite as 'radical' as it was ten years ago. However, dumpster diving is now even more important to me. It is an activity I strongly believe in, and one of the few I can still engage in, whilst caring for a young family. Dumpster diving allows me to pursue the issue of waste that I am passionate about. It also provides me with opportunities to share and discuss this issue with others.



Raylene exploring a dumpster haul with Ted and Percy.



My usual dumpster diving route takes about two hours (depending on the night). With hubby at home with the kids, the two hours of adult company is a treasure in itself. Over the years, we have built up something of a dumpster diving community. In my local area, there are about ten people who come diving with me on either a regular or semi-regular basis. Each of these people dive for different reasons, ranging from ethical to financial to social. Typically, we head out after dark, or at least an hour after stores close for the night. Usually, I go with one or two others. On occasion, four or more of us may break into two teams and each visit the loading bays of different stores, where the dumpsters are kept, and meet up later to sort and swap the produce and wares. There have been some nights when we have needed to drop off a car-load of 'stuff' at home before heading back out to finish our route.

People often ask me, 'have you ever been caught?'. The answer to this question is yes, many times. In fact the possibility of 'being caught' (by either security or store managers or just a passer-by) is a really important element of dumpster diving for me. I consider being open to, and suitably prepared for, such encounters a significant opportunity to draw attention to the wastefulness of our society. The trick is to do this in a manner that can be received well. 1 Peter 3:15 has become a bit of a mantra for me in these situations: 'Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.'

Typically, when we encounter either staff or security it is dark,

there are not many people around and they are likely nervous about just what might happen. I always try to discern the vibe before I decide how much I engage in a conversation about why we are doing what we are doing. I've learnt that people typically become very abrasive when the issue becomes personal. If we are told we are trespassing – a fact that I am respectfully aware of – I take this as my signal to not engage any further and just politely leave. Generally, if our conduct is calm and respectful we don't have an issue.

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### Each of these people dive for different reasons, ranging from ethical to financial to social.

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Some of my more memorable encounters of 'getting caught' involve building relationships with security and cleaning staff, to the point that they became divers themselves. The security guard

would walk by the dumpster during the day and make a mental list of anything he thought he might like. He'd then wait for us to arrive (before he headed home at the finish of his shift) and let us know he'd stashed a trolley in an alcove around the corner, where we could put his 'loot' for him to discreetly pick up in the morning. The cleaner attached a milk crate to the back of his bike so he could take his 'groceries' home at the end of his shift.

Another question I often encounter is, 'what is the best thing you have ever found diving?' My response to this question is often varied, depending on who is asking, as there are a lot of items that stand out. Most people are interested in the night we found a bin full of alcohol, close to a thousand dollars worth in total. However, my personal favourite was an instance of providence that was more significant than extravagant.





I had reached that stage in life where I couldn't put off underwear shopping any longer. I had accepted the fact that I would just have to expose my two young children to a horrible big department store and spend a somewhat significant sum of money on replacing my almost threadbare collection. During this time, I was also busy making Christmas presents and had lamented not having a range of coloured cottons to sew with. Upon further thinking, I realised I would also need many more bobbins than I currently had and that it would take a long time to fill each of these with the coloured cottons. Being a mum, time for such ventures as sewing is very scarce, so I decided to be content with the white thread I already had.

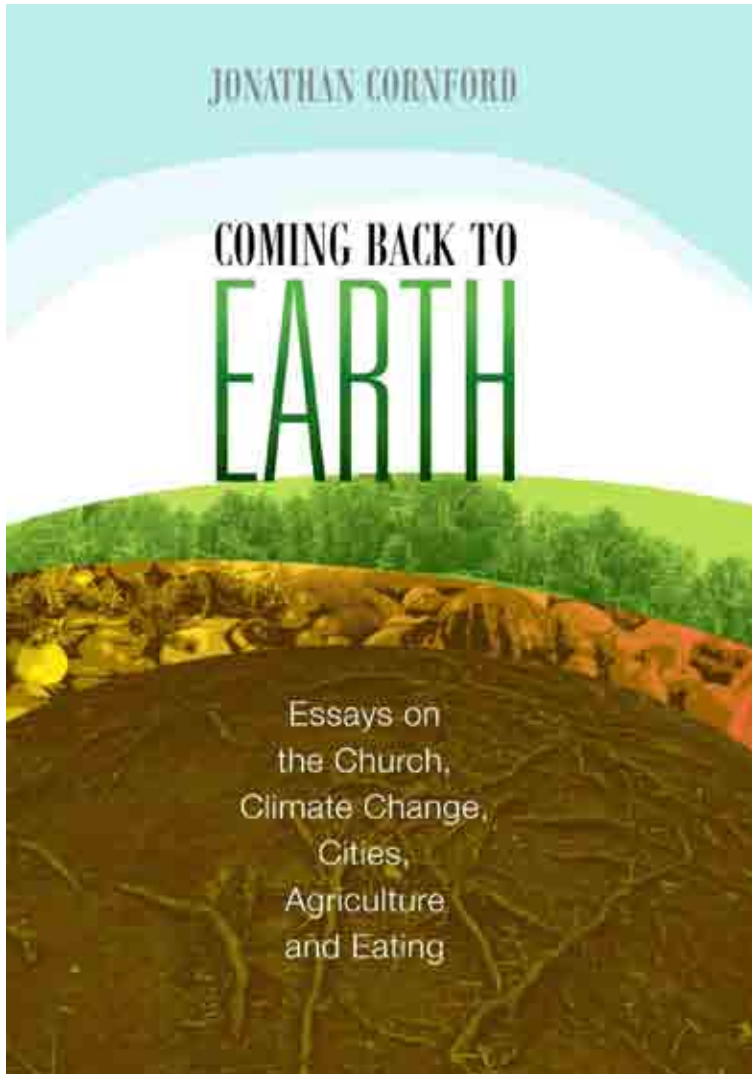
On my very next dumpster dive, I found thirteen pairs of good quality underwear, all in my size, and a sewing kit that had thirty bobbins threaded with thirty colours of cotton. Who knew God's providence could come from a dumpster?

As with all significant societal issues, my actions seem to count for very little in the big picture: salvaging food and material goods from six or seven stores on a weekly basis has a miniscule impact on the problem of waste in Australia. But then again, as with all societal issues, we all have a chance, or rather a choice, to respond as best we are able.

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Who knew God's providence could come from a dumpster?

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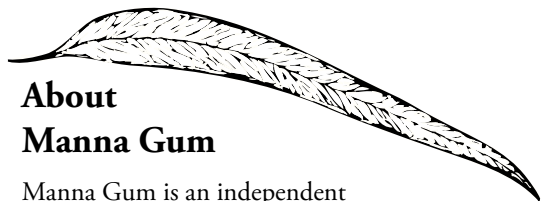
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Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. *Help Christians reclaim and practise Biblical teaching on material life; and*
2. *Promote understanding of the ways our economic lives impact upon ourselves, others and the earth.*

Manna Gum is motivated by a vision of renewal of the Church in Australia as an alternative community that witnesses to the Kingdom of God.

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